7 July 2003

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-third session
9 June-3 July 2003
Agenda item 7
Improving the working methods and procedures of the Committee for Programme and Coordination within the framework of its mandate

Improving the working methods and procedures of the Committee for Programme and Coordination within the framework of its mandate

Summary by the Chairman

In its resolution 57/282 of 20 December 2002, the General Assembly requested the Committee for Programme and Coordination to continue to observe its methods of governing the drafting and format of its reports. The Assembly also encouraged the Committee to continue its discussions on improving its working methods and procedures within the framework of its mandate with a view to further enhancing its effectiveness and continued relevance.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 57/300 of 20 December 2002, "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change", reaffirmed the roles of the Fifth Committee, the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in the intergovernmental consideration of the planning, programming and budgeting process. The Assembly invited the Committee for Programme and Coordination to continue to improve its working methods.

The Committee welcomed the request of the Assembly and agreed to examine practical measures for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of its work. Measures for improving the working methods of the Committee should be pragmatic and realistic.

Terms of reference of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

The Committee reaffirmed its terms of reference as set out in Economic and Social Council resolution 2008 (LX). The Committee also reaffirmed its function as the main subsidiary organ of the Council and the General Assembly for planning,

programming and coordination, as well as the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.

Documentation

Problems of documentation, conference rooms and interpretation in meetings, which affect the work of the Committee, need to be resolved. The Committee reaffirmed the need for documentation to be submitted to it in accordance with the six-week rule. The Committee also reaffirmed the need to obtain the proper conference resources for its sessions.

Streamlining the work of the Committee

Since three bodies are involved in the budgetary process, it was noted that measures should also be taken to streamline the work of the Committee and to avoid duplication with other bodies. The Committee should consider programmatic aspects of the programme budget and refrain from addressing budgetary issues, including figures and resources. The discussions should be strategic and policy-oriented. As a practical matter, the Committee should strive to add value in its mandated areas of work.

It was suggested that a high-level segment for a maximum period of three or four days at the beginning of each session of the Committee was needed to provide a forum for members to focus on strategic issues, the policy direction of the medium-term plan or the budget proposal, and results achieved. For high-level representatives from capitals, it would be impossible to attend a session of the Committee of four or six weeks' duration. On the other hand, it was felt that guidance at the political level was necessary in order to cope with the tasks entrusted to the Committee. Consequently, sessions should consist of two parts: an introductory high-level segment and an additional segment for a more detailed discussion at the working level.

Duration of the session and focus of its work

It was proposed that the Committee's session be shortened to not more than three weeks every year and that the Committee concentrate on items that concern subsidiary organs whose main task is to give guidance for planning, programming and coordination. Therefore, the Committee should limit its work to the review of the medium-term plan and the proposed programme budget. It was also noted that in contrast with other expert and advisory bodies, the Committee had tried its utmost to complete its heavy programme of work under the pressure of time, and therefore the shortening of its session would not be realistic for the fulfilment of its work.

The Committee should devote more attention to the assessment of programme performance and evaluation. This would be useful for both Member States and programme managers. Evaluation identifies the added value of programmes and activities. It can make a concrete contribution to future planning and budget cycles by providing comments on the outcomes achieved in past cycles. In this connection, the Committee would need to draw not only on in-depth and thematic evaluations, but also on the outcomes of self-evaluation by programme managers and of the programme performance reports.

Formal meetings

In order to make optimal use of time, it was proposed that the formal meetings be concise. In the same vein, rather than a section-by-section consideration of the programme budget, it could be discussed part-by-part. Time limits on interventions and deadlines for the submission of proposals for conclusions and recommendations are useful and should be observed. While recognizing that deliberations of the Committee provide a unique opportunity for direct interaction with programme managers, it could be useful to focus the discussion more on the practical outcomes of the Committee's work. It is important that in planning meetings every effort be made to ensure that the relevant programme managers, and not officers-in-charge, participate in formal meetings of the Committee. This is especially relevant when it comes to the consideration of the relevant sections of the budget or programmes of the medium-term plan. The provision for the rollover of items within a day is a sound practice and should be observed.

Informal consultations

The format of intergovernmental negotiations word by word is not optimal for all the work of the Committee. In addition to being very time-consuming, it tends to dilute the weight of good ideas.

Formal negotiations on texts should be kept to the minimum necessary. An effort should be made to work on the basis of texts prepared by the Chair. In trying this process, the Committee should decide not to spend time on the negotiation of the evaluation and coordination items; instead, the Chairman should be entrusted with preparing their conclusion.

Informal consultations of the Committee should focus strictly on the drafting of its conclusions and recommendations. They should not be viewed as yet another opportunity for the continuation of the debate from the formal meetings. Interaction with the representatives of the Secretariat in the informal consultations should be limited to receiving information indispensable for a particular delegation for taking a position with respect to specific conclusions and recommendations being drafted. Delegations should participate in the informal consultations in a spirit that is different from that of the formal meetings with a view to preparing the report of the Committee. The Committee should not spend time on formalities in the informal consultations. In view of the subsidiary nature of the Committee and its technical role for the parent bodies, delegations should participate in a spirit of technical contribution. The participation of observers is welcome in the formal meetings. But in the informal meetings, where the decision-making takes place, active participation in the discussion should be limited to the elected members of the Committee. When the members are in agreement on a decision, they can proceed with that action and should not wait until the observers are accommodated. In other words, observers cannot impede the progress of the work of the members of the Committee.

Report of the Committee

The report of the Committee is too long and needs streamlining. A useful introduction should be prepared at the beginning of the report, addressing cross-cutting issues. These would be the Committee's strategic observations on the programme budget and evaluation issues. Therefore, the section-by-section

comments should be presented in clear narrative form, rather than the present unreadable "delete sentence two and add ..." form.

The treatment of the report of the Committee in the Economic and Social Council by simply taking note of it is not productive. The Council should be requested to provide its assessment of and expectations for the reports of the Committee.

A letter from the Chairman to the Presidents of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly should accompany the report of the Committee, highlighting the main issues.

The Committee welcomes the successful introduction of videoconferencing to the Committee and agrees to intensify this as a satisfactory operational and cost-effective tool for intergovernmental activity.

The Committee agrees to discontinue its consideration of the Office of Internal Oversight Services triennial reports and to focus instead on Office of Internal Oversight Services thematic evaluation reports and on greater attention to the results and follow-up to evaluation reports of the Joint Inspection Unit.